

**GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CITIZENS (GACEC)
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

7:00P.M., September 17, 2019

**George V. Massey Station, Second Floor Conference Room
516 West Loockerman Street, Dover, DE**

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Al Cavalier, Cathy Cowin, Bill Doolittle, Ann Fisher, Robert Overmiller, Jennifer Pulcinella, Susan Campbell, Terri Hancharick, Laura Waterland, Dana Levy, Mary Ann Mieczkowski, Matt Denn, and Karen Eller.

OTHERS PRESENT: Guests: Kim Krzanowski, Office of Early Learning, Kim Brancato, Principal Appoquinimink Early Learning Center, Jason Hustedt, researcher University of Delaware, Cindy Brown, Part C 619 Department of Education.

Staff present: Wendy Strauss/ Executive Director, Kathie Cherry/ Office Manager and Sybil Baker/ Administrative Coordinator.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Dafne Carnright, Nancy Cordrey, Thomas Keeton, Beth Mineo, Carrie Melchisky, Emmanuel Jenkins, Tika Hartsock, Kimberly Warren and Brennè Shepperson.

Chair Ann Fisher called the meeting to order at 7:05. Ann asked for and received a **motion to approve** the September meeting agenda, the **motion was approved**.

Motion made to approve June meeting minutes as submitted. **Motion approved. A motion was made to approve the June, July, and August financial reports. The motion was approved.**

Public Comments

No public comment

Ann introduced our Universal Pre-K panelist. She first thanked them for coming to speak to us and then asked if they had a chance to review the question.

Introductions Kim Brancato, Principal, Appoquinimink Early Learning Center, Kim Krzanowski, Executive Director of the Office of Early Learning at the Department of Education, Jason Hustedt, University of Delaware Researcher and Dr. Rena Halem University of Delaware. Cindy Brown 619 coordinator, DOE and Sue Campbell Part B coordinator, Department of Health and Social Services.

After introductions, the panel discussion was facilitated by Council Chair Ann Fisher, Ann asked the prepared questions and took responses from the panelist. The questions and pertinent discussion points are listed below.

- **How will Universal Pre-K be funded?**

Kim K. This is a big question. The short answer is we don't know. There needs to be a dedicated new stream of funding to support a project like this. DE. Does have state funded pre-K ECAP (Early Childhood Assistance Program). It serves 825 children and the funding has been stagnant for many years. She stressed that this type of program would need a dedicated funding stream, not one-time funds. Philadelphia has a sugary drink tax to fund Pre-k. Other states use lottery funds. These states dedicate this funding to the program each year.

Jason: I have been working on Pre-k issues for the past 15 years. Prior to being at the University of Delaware (UD) he was at the National Institute for Early Education research where they produced a report on Pre-K models across the nation. Every state is sort of doing its own thing. The good news is there are a lot of examples of successful universal Pre-K programs. He reiterated the need for a sustainable dedicated stream of funding. But there are few states that offer Universal Pre-K. Less than 10 probably. He stressed that Universal means about 60-70% attendance, parents have the option to choose Pre-K or not.

Rena: Many states use income eligibility for qualifications for state funded Pre-K programs.

The question was posed about waiting lists or students turned away from the ECAP program? Kim K indicated that she did not have data but since there are 13 programs currently that bid on those 845 slots, she feels sure there are waiting list.

Cindy Brown: In the past when the pre-school development grants were issued, that is what allowed some states to develop programs. Delaware wasn't the recipient of one of those grants. Delaware currently has a preschool development grant, but the focus is entirely different.

- **How will transportation be handled?**

Kim K. currently transportation is one of the states largest expenditures. The transportation would be an area that would require some thought. Currently some programs provide their own transportation for some students and parents provide transportation for others.

Jason: Theoretically universal would mean there would be a program near where students live similar to school districts.

The question was posed to Jason, how do current universal programs handle transportation? Jason is not sure, it is not something that is really talked about. In NY state the families provide their own transportation.

Ann shared her concern that without provided transportation children in Sussex County, in particular would be limited in participation by geography and the state's public transportation system.

Rena: The program being across different types of setting would increase accessibility for students significantly. So how the program is set up profoundly affects accessibility.

Al Cavalier asked what the thinking was about how transportation would be handled in the first state pr-K plan?

Kim K. The First State Pre-K plan (that was presented to Council a few months ago), is NOT a DOE initiative. They are not sure how their plan will handle specific items. The group of advocates that developed the plan consulted the department on some issues, but DOE did not have a hand in the planning. When asked about the dollar figure for the proposed plan, Kim shared that there is a big dollar value to the plan. She is not sure how they came to that figure, whether they took the current ECAP program funding and just multiplied it by the number of 4-year olds. Again, the funding is the issue that boggles people's minds. Where will this dedicated funding come from. Kim shared that NJ legislated preschool plan is costing the state millions of dollars. Much of the work that would need to be done for this plan wouldn't be able to be done in one legislative year, it is likely to take many years.

Laura inquired about why the centers that are accepting POC (purchase of care) couldn't just be provided a curriculum and implement it and still utilize POC money.

Rena: There are additional requirements for universal PreK than for those community programs. So, the qualifications for the workforce have to be considered as well as providing the avenues for current staff to gain certification. All of these things have to be considered.

- **How many four-year olds are expected to participate the first year?**

Jason: We have about 11,000 4-year old's in Delaware. The current ECAP program has 845 slots. The answer to that question depends heavily on how the program is rolled out. It would be very unusual to go from 845 students to 11,000 all at once. Florida served 47% of its 4-year old's in its first year but this is unusual, Florida currently serves 77% of its 4-year old's.

Kim K: Pointed out that 4-year olds are being served. Its not as if there are 11,000 students not being served. They are being served in childcare centers and private program, some may be receiving home visits. The Department is just starting to collect data this year about where the 4-year olds are being served. Every district is tracking incoming kindergarten students and where they were being served and what type of program, they participated in.

Kim B: In addition to ECAP there are many 4-year old's, particularly those with special needs, being served in the districts, so these students are a part of that 11,000 students.

Rena: Pointed out that early childhood is not just 4-year old's and any plan that would be rolled out needs to consider how to provide high quality programming for all early learning students, not just 4-year olds.

Ann inquired about any other states that have universal Pre-K having issues with just focusing on Pre-K and not infants and toddlers or early learners as a whole.

Kim K: The workforce in birth to five is very fragile so we have to make sure that as we elevate those that serve one group (4-year old's) we elevate those who serve infants and toddlers. Our birth to five workforce is very fragile right now.

Rena: Pre-K can be rolled out in a way to bolster early childhood community, but it can also be rolled out to be competitive. If you own a childcare center and lose a bunch of four-year old's you might go out of business, it is more expensive to take care of infants than 4-year olds.

Kim K: It is very much a concern with our centers that it would not be a mixed delivery model and be one sided. Partnerships and collaborations are essential, and we need time to cultivate that across the state. Kim discussed the disparity right now for early childhood teachers to get the recognition as professionals that in some cases they do not get. The workforce is very fragile and scattered right now.

Kim B: Most districts don't have the capacity to serve that number of 4-year old's so that would not be an option right away.

- **Where will the teachers for the program come from?**

Kim K: Delaware has multiple higher ed institutions that offer early childhood degrees. However, the traditional student schedule doesn't always fit. We are dealing with working individuals that lack support and funding is not universal (no forgiveness programs). All of these are seen as deterrents. If a pre-k model were to be developed it would require that we work with our higher ed institutes to bring current to earn a degree. This would be another avenue that would require innovative programs and collaboration to develop pathways to bring current early childhood staff up to the education level required.

Jason: This is really complex puzzle that will require a lot of work in order to develop a strong workforce.

- How long do you think it will take to develop infrastructure to absorb the children in Delaware that need to be served?

Jason: This really encompasses a lot of the things we have been talking about, money, education, teacher capacity, collaboration. More data analysis is needed to truly decide on time frame. Jason estimated 5 years at a minimum.

- **Is there a unified curriculum?**

Kim K: Kim feels like there would absolutely need to be a strong curriculum to be developed and it would need to serve children of all abilities. There is not currently a unified curriculum but there would absolutely need to be one. There is always discussion about is there some way to identify the

type of skill sets and abilities children entering into Kindergarten have and ensure that everyone has them.

Rena: Some states may have a unified curriculum; most states operate much like Delaware, where a curriculum needs to be approved according to a set of state standards.

- **Is attendance mandatory? Are individuals able to home school and get support? Can day care providers participate?**

Rena: In some cities and states they do partner with a wide variety of small centers.

Cindy B: Technically “homeschool” doesn’t apply to pre-k because they have not yet reached the mandatory attendance for K-12.

Wendy asked if anyone on the panel is collaborating with the group of advocates who are currently proposing universal pre-K?

Kim K: The district is always open to collaborate; the department would need to feel comfortable with the wording of any initiative that might be brought forward. From the departments perspective they would need to make sure that whatever was mandated in any proposed legislation, the department would be able to fulfill the requirement on any time frame that was laid out. Much more research is needed, and the wording needs to be almost perfect and implementation would need to be done with caution.

All the partners, stakeholders and families really need to be at the table in the development of a program of this magnitude.

Laura Waterland asked if the Department has asked for more money for the ECAP program.

Kim K: The program started in 1994 and the budget has been at 6.1 for an exceptionally long period of time. Given the state of the budget in recent years it appears that there are many priorities and not all are receiving additional funding. Jason shared that according to his research in 2003 the program served approximately 83 students.

Rena thanked council for initiating this discussion. Kim K. thanked council as well and reiterated that the department is always agreeable to open dialogue.

Wendy asked Kim K. to talk a little about the Delaware Stars redesign. She shared that it started back in 2017 with getting peoples opinion of the Stars program, why people like it, what are some of the challenges? What could be done differently? The department then contracted with a national consulting company out of Boston. They have been helping a team of leadership think about the redesign in terms of Phase 1, Phase2, Phase 3. Right now, Phase 1 is looking at structural redesign. Several focus groups have been held to gather information about the proposed changes. Kim explained that the focus of the first three levels have changed, but how those levels are reached has changed: the 1st level is Health and Safety, the 2nd level administration and leadership, and the 3rd level is

environments. Participating and fulfillment of these three levels are set, you can't become a level 2 if you don't complete all of the items in level one for example. The 4th and 5th star levels would be where those choices come in, choice points will focus on interactions with children and adults and intentional teaching. We know that you can have a great curriculum and tools but if you don't have adult and child interaction things can begin to fall apart. This is not a once every five-year redesign, the plan is to have a good base and then do minor tweaks as needed to keep the system up to date. Three things that came out of the focus groups were, an overwhelmingly positive response to having level one include licensing from OCCL, so if your licensed you could be a star level one, but additional steps would be required to earn the star level. Number two was a focus on administration and leadership; we have people that want to be great leaders but don't have the resources to do so. Finally, those that came to the meeting expressed that interactions were only being viewed for star levels four and five and felt very strongly that they needed to take place at all star levels. The feedback will be collected and taken back to the leadership group and now there will be groups formed to look at standards revision. If anyone here wants to be on the sub committees Kim encouraged them to contact John Fisher-Klein to express interest in joining. The group is also considering being flexible about how different programs will be evaluated. Family centers don't look the same as large centers and we shouldn't force them to conform to a program that does not align with the service they are trying to provide their families. They want to make sure, after all is said and done, that a star level 5 center in Newcastle is the same as a 5 in Kent or Sussex.

Ann and Wendy thanked our speakers for sharing their knowledge tonight.

Ann called the meeting back to order. And announced absent members. She reminded members of the retreat on October 19.

CHAIR/DIRECTORS REPORT

Wendy shared Representative Williams comments on universal pre k. She is supportive of a pre k for all and supportive of paying for those who cannot afford it. There are many other budget items that require additional funding such as K-3 special education funding.

Wendy asked Matt Denn to share information that what discussed at a meeting of the Superintendents that Matt, Wendy, Josette Manning, and Representative Deb Heffernan attended. Matt shared that there was legislation that GACEC supported from back in 2015 which required schools to once a year contact parents of children with disabilities to try to establish parent councils. There are a few districts that are doing well, Appoquinimink is one of those. Josette shared information about what appo does. The meeting was used to gently encourage the superintendents to follow the law and know what is working and encouraging them to share it with their school leaders. Additionally, Matt is working with Representative Heffernan, one of the legislations sponsors to target parents directly so that they can go to their school and ask what the school is doing to establish a parent council. Matt feels like everyone does something, but some do a better job than others. The goal is to try on both ends to see more districts have an effective parent council.

Ann shared that Cindy asked Council to write a letter of support for the grant that part C is applying for. Jennifer shared that it was for intensive technical assistance for 2.5 years to develop inclusionary models.

A motion was made to write a letter of support for Part C based on the information Jenn shared. **The motion was approved.**

Laura shared that DLP priorities are on their website and they are asking for public comments. Kathie has sent the link out to members already.

Ann thanked our speakers and welcomed Matt Denn as a new member. She advised that letters and responses are available in the back of the room.

DOE REPORT

No DOE Report.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

No Committee reports were given.

A motion was made **to adjourn** the meeting. The **motion** was **approved**. The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.